




Speech By
Peter Russo

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

Record of Proceedings, 2 March 2017

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (11.57 am): I move—

That the House take note of Finance and Administration Committee, report No. 35 titled *Inquiry into how to improve health and safety outcomes for combat sports contestants in high risk and amateur contests in Queensland*.

Currently in Queensland, combat sports are self-regulated and individual disciplines have multiple forms of self-regulation by a number of different organisations. The self-regulation varies greatly between sports and between amateur and professional contests. Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria each have stand-alone bodies to regulate combat sports. Combat sports in Tasmania and South Australia are regulated by government departments. A comparative table of interstate regulation and relevant legislation provided by the department is contained within the report.

The committee received eight submissions into the inquiry. On behalf of the committee, I thank those submitters for their submissions and the departmental officers for their cooperation in providing information to the committee in a timely manner. While it is unfortunate that the committee only received eight submissions, this could be a reflection of the nature of the combat sports industry, with many groups and organisations operating in relative isolation from each other. Of the eight submissions received, four supported self-regulation and some government intervention by way of mandatory or voluntary standards for combat sports; three submissions were from medical organisations and, while they opposed combat sports, they provided recommended harm-minimisation measures to protect combat sport contestants; and two submissions supported a government-led commission to regulate all combat sports in Queensland.

On consideration of the material before it, a majority of the committee members considered there was no demonstrated need for an inquiry at this time and the committee resolved to take no further action on this inquiry. In my statement of reservation, I expressed the contrary view. The tragic loss of the lives of two young men—one in a contest in Toowoomba and one in a contest in Mackay—made a need for an inquiry on this issue clear.

There were submissions made that Queensland has no minimum health, safety and public standards to manage expectations of the government, the combat sports industry and the community in terms of combat sports. There is no single Queensland or national body responsible to coordinate consistent, effective and standardised self-regulation of combat sports to ensure suitable risk management and minimum health, safety and public standards. There are no publicly available standards that articulate how to minimise health and safety harm arising from combat sports.

Given there are an unknown number of combat sports groups and organisations operating in Queensland, it is difficult to obtain a clear understanding of how each and every combat sports event deals with the associated risks to the health and safety of the participants and the spectators. There appears to be no activity of the department to correlate any information on how combat sports are self-regulated in Queensland and therefore no data or reliable facts upon which to base any findings.

When the department was asked whether cage fighting or kickboxing in Queensland has the same level of self-regulation as some boxing organisations in Queensland, the department advised—

We do not know. I think that is the crux of the issue: we do not know.

...

We do not know what the practices are within those sports and within each discipline of those sports.

The Queensland Brain Institute at the University of Queensland considers that self-regulation is insufficient to protect participants in high-risk combat sports. While it notes that some codes have introduced detailed regulations to protect their contestants, enforcing such rules would increase harm minimisation. Despite the lack of available data in Queensland, it is clear that repeated blows to the head during combat sports will cause head trauma.